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PETRARCH

AND HIS INFLUENCE ON

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

PETER BORGHESI



BOLOGNA

NICHOLAS ZANICHELLI

1906



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PREFACE



It was our wish to know something about the influence which Petrarch had on English literature. We tried to find a book on the subject both in Italy and England, but, as our researches were in vain, we undertook to treat of it ourselves and we have succeeded in writing these few pages.

Of course all that we have written is not the fruit of our personal observations alone; we have consulted, besides the works of all the authors mentioned in this essay, many other books including those of eminent historians and critics,

such as Warton, Courthope, Saintsbury, Ten Brink, Taine, Einstein, Segrè, to whom we avow our obligations.

In the course of our researches we have observed that, although the English have never been slavish imitators of any particular people or individual, yet they owe to Petrarch much more than we at first believed.

We have divided our modest essay into two parts: in the first we have treated of the influence of Petrarch on the English literature and chiefly of the English humanism of the XIV and XV centuries; in the second we have dealt with the English Petrarchism in the XVI century and we have extended our observations also to the XVII, when it died out altogether in England.

We should have liked to have given more quotations from the authors referred

to, and to have drawn more parallels with Petrarch, but we are sorry that the scanty information we have in our Italian libraries and the short time we were able to spend in England have not allowed us to treat the subject in a more exhaustive way. On the other hand we have thought also that, to treat fully a subject like this, the work would become too long, tiresome and monotonous, and even though it were admissible to compare Petrarch with a single Petrarchist, it would not be so in an essay where about thirty English authors are compared with our great singer of Laura. Therefore our chief aim has been to put before the eyes of our readers a few pages from which the influence of Petrarch on English literature may be clearly and readily seen.

Have we succeeded? Our readers will judge. We shall be satisfied if, having

commenced the work, it may be the means of inducing others to add to our researches.



The XIV and XV centuries.



No doubt, intercourse between England and Italy began with the Roman conquest in the time of the Emperor Claudius, but, although the Romans remained in England for about four centuries, they nevertheless did not leave behind any great influence.

It was the ardour of the new spirit of Christianity which gave origin to the many and lasting ties that joined England to Rome and consequently to Italy. First Italian missionary monks went there to introduce Christianity, and afterwards, even before the Norman conquest, Italian laymen went there for commercial purposes. So it is certain that regular and active commercial intercourse existed between England and Italy even before 1229.

At that time commerce in our country was very prosperous and was always increasing, so that in the first half of the XIV century it was so renowned abroad that we were unrivalled by any other nation. At that time moreover Italian merchants in England had attained to such a degree of importance, and commerce between the two countries had become so considerable that in 1372 Chaucer, with two Genoese gentlemen, James Pronan and John de Mari, went to Genoa to consider the selection of a place on the English coast where the Genoese might found a commercial establishment.

During the last centuries of the Middle Ages Italy had also led the way in literature; hence we see many young Englishmen coming here to study in our old and renowned universities — chiefly at Bologna and Padua. The first thing that a student does when abroad is naturally to learn the language of the country where he is, and just as the Italian merchants who resided in England tried to speak

English, so the Englishmen who came to Italy studied Italian.

We are pleased to say that the English were not much behind us: their Oxford University was then very famous, and if we cannot prove that Dante studied theology there, as has been stated, or even that he was ever at Oxford or Paris, it would nevertheless be an easy task to prove that the Oxford University was renowned not only in England, but also abroad and especially in Italy.

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But let us come to our subject which treats of the influence Petrarch had on English literature, and we shall see that this influence was second to that of no other foreign writer.

During his own lifetime Petrarch, this poet who refined and popularized the poetry of the troubadours, was certainly known in England, as when he was only 37 years old his reputation was already made throughout Europe, and it increased



up to the time of his death. He was an extraordinary example, for, strange as it may appear, he was the first man of letters who made for himself a great position by letters alone, and, even while living, he enjoyed a renown perhaps greater than that of Aretin and Voltaire.

It has been stated that he may have been in England in 1335 or some time later when he undertook to visit the North of France and the Netherlands. Rearden, an American writer, seems inclined to think so, but most probably Petrarch was never in the British Islands.

Perhaps the first Englishman who knew him personally was Richard de Bury, and he became acquainted with him at the cosmopolitan town of Avignon, where Petrarch's mind was most developed, and most probably the English gentleman was introduced to Petrarch in Colonna's house, either in 1331 or 1333 — probably in the latter year. Of course they must have talked about literature, as the love of books was common to them, but the literary ideals of the English scholar were

alien to those of our poet, and to the new impulse which our poet wished to give to poetry. Richard de Bury belongs to scholastic philosophy: he was a philosopher, a divine and the most learned Englishman of that time, but he was not a poet. His erudition was rather narrow and without order, there was no sign of individuality in him and there was no depth in his ideas. There was therefore too great a difference between him and Petrarch. It could not be otherwise as the two scholars had quite a different education; they differed just as did the English people differ from the people of Avignon: the former almost coarse, the latter too refined. Therefore the learned Englishman could neither approve of nor appreciate the new poetry and learning, nor the luxury that he saw at Avignon. Petrarch himself recognized at once his superiority over de Bury as is shown in a letter he addressed to Thomas Caloria.

To understand Petrarch it was necessary to be a poet, and this poet was not long in making himself known: it was

Chaucer who was the greatest of foreign verse-makers who lived in Petrarch's time.

As we have remarked before, it is quite certain that Chaucer was in Italy in 1372 when Petrarch was still alive, but it is not certain whether these two poets were ever personally acquainted as has been stated by many critics and by Chaucer himself: it is only most probable. The fact is that Chaucer could read and understand Italian, and that, after Boccaccio, Petrarch was his favourite author. Indeed Chaucer is so full of admiration for our poet that in a passage in his *Monk's Tale* he calls him « my master ».

The influence that the Italian lyric writer had on Chaucer was great, although perhaps the former was known to the latter much more through his Latin works than through his sonnets. This influence is clearly seen if we consider the honourable place which is generally given to women in Chaucer's writings, and if we remember that both Petrarch's and Chaucer's works were the first to be freed from

theological purpose. This also appears very clearly in the *House of Fame* and chiefly in *Troilus and Criseyde* (although the latter is rather a translation from Boccaccio), where the song of Troilus, beginning at the 400.th verse, starts with a literal translation of the first verses of the 88.th of Petrarch's sonnets.

So Chaucer then was the first Englishman who imitated Italian poetry, the first to tell his nation that a new age had dawned in Italy and that it was full time to lay aside the French troubadours and trouvères in spite of the beauty of their songs. Italy could give to England much more than France, and Petrarch perhaps more than anyone else.

But as Petrarch was not understood in England during the XIV century, so did Chaucer fail to win any disciples: England was not yet prepared to accept the gentle, delicate, refined feelings and poetry of Petrarch. Therefore we cannot venture to say that our author had any influence, except on Chaucer, on the English literature of the XIV century; we cannot

indeed even say that he was the real master of Chaucer.

As we have already pointed out in our essay *Boccaccio and Chaucer*, the latter was much more influenced by our *novellatore*, because these two great men were more akin, and also perhaps because at first Petrarch was not considered as a great poet, but rather a scholar, a humanist.

It does not matter to us whether humanism in Italy began with Pietro d' Abano, or soon after Dante's death, or with Petrarch: we only wish to say that Petrarch was a humanist and that as such he had a great influence on Chaucer. In his life-time Petrarch was chiefly renowned for his learning, for his Latin works, therefore Chaucer, who studied and admired him and learned so much from him, should be considered as the first English humanist. For humanism in England spread long before the Renaissance, and from the time of Chaucer and Thomas of England, who was at Florence in 1395 buying manuscripts and

delivering lectures (1), we could give a long list of humanists who were known not only in England, but also abroad.

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After Chaucer the Petrarchan influence was discontinued in England: Gower, Lydgate and other poets were not able to appreciate the true spirit of our literature, although perhaps they were familiar with certain Italian books. England continued unprepared for the new literary movement, therefore poetry remained very backward in that country, while it made much progress in ours.

Here was then the very abode of belles-lettres and fine arts. Poets and artists were loved, encouraged and protected by the Italian princes. Where else was the splendour of the Italian courts? Where such interest in art? Where such cultivation of poetry? What nation was then so wealthy?

(1) Leonardo Bruni.

Italy had all the commerce between the Orient and Western Europe; Italy had the most renowned universities. Foreigners came here not only for commercial purposes, but also to study literature, medicine and law, therefore sooner or later the Italian spirit had to pass abroad. Indeed if it was then too soon for Petrarch's poetry to find its way to England and to predominate there, such was not the case with regard to Italian humanism.

It has been said that humanism crossed the Alps in 1414 and that it made its first appearance abroad at the Council of Constance where England was represented by Richard Fleming; but, if it is not right to state that humanism began in England with Chaucer, it may be that the son of Henry IV, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester heard and understood something about it even before the above mentioned date. At a very early age he became a great collector and reader of books which he bought in Italy and France. He was a patron of learned men, and it seems he began to present books to the University

of Oxford about the year 1411, when he was only twenty. Moreover, and this strongly supports our opinion, he retained learned foreigners in his service for the purpose of transcribing and translating from Greek and Latin. We are sure that Antonio de Beccaria, a learned Veronese, was in his service, that Titus Livius of Forlì was much patronized by him, and that these two learned men, together with Lapo da Castiglionchio were by him called to England. We are sure that he greatly esteemed Piero del Monte, Leonardo Bruni and Pier Candido Decembrio. He was certainly an extraordinary man and far in advance of his age. He must undoubtedly have understood humanism, as among the books he presented to Oxford were the writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the text and commentaries of Dante and the great writers of antiquity whose works had been recently discovered in Italy.

So little by little the new learning found its way to England, but it was there fully understood only towards the end of the XV century. Many English

scholars tried to introduce it even earlier, but they did not succeed, they did not make many disciples; they are only solitary examples and represent vain efforts. They only succeeded in bringing there new books and in preparing the literary food for the coming generations.

Italian Humanism was much helped by the English kings who, towards the end of the XV century, began to introduce into their courts the brilliancy of our princes. It is true that kings and princes encouraged it perhaps only because they thought it possible in England, as well as in Italy, France and Spain, to found an absolute monarchy, but the effect they produced was far more than merely political.

About the year 1460 Edward IV began to aid the growth of letters, and as many of the barons had been killed in the civil war, and the church had lost its influence, and the power of the Commons had been checked in mid-growth, and especially as humanism had brought new ideas

about sovereignty into England, he was practically able to discontinue parliament and found the basis of a new monarchy to be built up after an ancient pattern.

Certainly he aided arts and letters after the manner of an Italian prince, but, as political unrest still continued in England, he could not do much for them.

It was not till the reign of Henry VII that the position of learning began to be secure in England. This monarch, a real Mæcenas, was a friend of the dukes of Ferrara and Urbino who were greatly renowned at that time; he advanced literature and arts as the Italian despots used then to do, called to his court many Italians, among whom we may mention the poet Peter Carmeliano, and caused one of his sons to be educated by the poet Skelton, the celebrated contemporary and perhaps also precursor of Rabelais.

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We have said that the Petrarchan influence on English literature during the

XV century was little or nothing at all, but we are sure that literary intercourse continued, after Chaucer's time, between the two countries. While many Italians resided in England and perhaps brought to that country several of the earliest manuscripts of the Italian poets and humanists which are still preserved in the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, many Englishmen on the other hand came to Italy to breathe the new spirit of the Italian arts, and if they did not then fully understand humanism, they yet proved to be not only intelligent, but high-minded scholars, gaining reputation and honourable places even in Italy.

In the middle of the XV century Reynold Chicheley, who had studied at Ferrara, was the rector of that University.

The poet Osbern Bowkenham, just at the beginning of the XV century lived five years in Venice, and Master Norton in 1425 and Master Bulkeley in 1429 came to Italy in quest of learning.

Andrew Ols, who is known only through Italian sources, was one of the

first English humanists. He was sent by his king as a royal envoy to the pope, and on his journey he stopped at Florence, where he became acquainted with several of the celebrities who surrounded Lorenzo de' Medici. He became very fond of Italian and bought so many manuscripts to take to England that they could not be sent overland: he was compelled to wait for a ship sailing to his country.

William Grey went to Florence, to buy books and to Ferrara to study. When he died he bequeathed his library to Balliol College, and among his books were the works of Petrarch, Poggio, Guarino of Verona, Bruni and other Italian humanists.

John Free, better known as Phreas, went to Ferrara to hear the above mentioned Guarino of Verona who taught in that University and who collected around him many of the English scholars of the XV century. He taught medicine for several years in Italy, studied law and belles-lettres and was so acquainted with Petrarch's works that, when a nephew of

William Grey died in Italy, he made use of arguments taken from Petrarch to console the sorrowing uncle who was his patron.

John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, another English Mæcenas, on his return from Palestine, stopped in Padua to study; then he went to Ferrara to visit the old and renowned scholar Guarino of Verona, and afterwards he proceeded to Florence to buy manuscripts. The enthusiasm of this nobleman for Italy was so great that Italian humanists like Francesco d'Arezzo dedicated their works to him.

John Gunthorpe, who was John Free's companion in Italy, was appointed Royal Chaplain and Dean of Wells where he built a deanery house after the Italian style.

Robert Fleming, the brother of Richard who was at the Council of Constance, went to Italy in quest of learning.

William Grocyn, who went to Italy to study under Poliziano, became professor of Greek at Oxford where he entertained Erasmus, and he had in his library the works of Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ficino, Fildelfo and Perotti.

Linacre at last brought to England so much of the Italian learning that it was no longer necessary to go to Italy to study.

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We have dealt rather at length with humanism because it is largely connected with Petrarch without whom it could not have spread so early and so rapidly both in Italy and abroad, and also because everywhere Petrarch was first known as a humanist. Only later did his vernacular poetry bring him immortality.

It is fitting also to note here that from what we have said it may be inferred that during the XV century Italy remained the fountain-head of the new learning. In fact so great was the renown of Italy that afterwards Erasmus, Holbein, Lope de Vega, Montaigne, Camoens and even Shakespeare owe very much to our country. Efforts were made everywhere to rival her, but, in spite of them, the new literary movement was not yet widely

understood in England, it being chiefly confined to Oxford where Linacre taught. Neither Stephen Hawes, a groom to Henry VII, nor Skelton felt the true spirit of the Renaissance: Petrarch was for them only a « famous clerk ».

Therefore although a copy of Petrarch's poems had found its way to the library of Peterhouse as early as 1426, and since that time and even before Petrarch was always read and studied by English scholars, yet the great transformation in that country only took place, as we shall see, in the XVI century.

The XVI century.

It is beyond the scope of our subject to describe the wealth of Italy during the XV and XVI centuries and to write here anything about the influence which Italian merchants had on England. Nothing was beautiful, nothing was appreciated by the English people except what came from Italy or at least what was made after the Italian fashion. As to-day we hold in great estimation everything coming from England, so, and even more, in those centuries did the English highly esteem everything coming from Italy. Look in every history of commerce, and you will find that this is so. To show how great was this influence it is enough to state here that Leonardo Frescobaldi was

so very famous in the XVI century and afterwards that Shakespeare immortalized him in his *Master Friskiball*, and that several Italian commercial words have since then remained in the English language.

On the other hand the quick-witted English were ready to learn the lessons that Italian bankers, merchants, navigators, explorers, geographers and writers of travels gave to them, and towards the end of the XVI century they were able to carry on unaided their own commerce.

It is true that the XVI century marked a decline in Italian commerce, but that was not yet known, abroad at least, and, in spite of it, Italy had still such wealthy bankers that Cosimo de' Medici, Duke of Florence, was able to lend L. 15000 to Henry VIII of England.

It is also impossible to describe the brilliancy of the Italian courts during that time, or the extent of the encouragement that every Italian prince gave to arts and letters: it was necessary for the success of a courtier that he should be a



poet. It is impossible also to describe the large quantity of books which were produced in Italy during those two centuries or the number of the foreigners who came here to study. Italy set the example to Europe in scholarship and poetry, and from the very beginning of the XVI century she began to be admired, not only for the splendour of her actual life and unrivalled universities, but also for her treasures of former ages. If the renown of the Italian wealth was voiced everywhere, the renown of the Italian literature was voiced still louder, and England was second to no other nation in assimilating the new literary movement.

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But when did this literary movement begin in England? It is very difficult to fix a date as everything in this world begins, grows and dies almost imperceptibly. Thus not only it is difficult, but, in most cases, it is also impossible, to find out the date of the very commencement of any change.

We could, from what we have discovered, fix this beginning from the time of Chaucer, had not the love of ancient literatures come to interrupt what the great English poet of the XIV century had begun, and had the English been more prepared to understand and develop what he had tried to introduce. We can state that about the beginning of the XVI century England was still in the Middle Ages. Study the English poetry between Chaucer's death and the last years of the reign of Henry VII and you will find a real, we should say, an enormous decline. No longer the vivid and bright style of Chaucer, no longer his naturalness and simplicity, no longer those characters that, even to day, are so extraordinarily true, passionate and living.

Up to the XVI century the English writers could only imitate the French and Spanish courts, but soon afterwards Italian books, especially books connected with etiquette, were translated into English, and the English court was quite transformed after the Italian fashion. Therefore

we may say that soon after the beginning of the XVI century Italian influence began to prevail in England. Italy had already introduced the study of classic literature in that country; she was now about to introduce there the spirit of her own literature and give a new turn to the vernacular poetry.

We have already spoken about the interest which Edward IV and Henry VII took in belles-lettres and fine arts, and now we must say that Henry VIII followed his father's example in appreciating Italian fashion, music and art. During his reign many Englishmen travelled in Italy to try to find in foreign lands and in the imitation of foreign habits some comfort for the sorrow they felt at the decadence of Mediæval chivalry. Naturally only the rich aristocracy could afford these travels, and it was almost the aristocracy alone that brought to England the ideas of the Renaissance. To show the love for learning which then existed in the English nobility and at court it is sufficient to state that

Edward VI knew seven languages when he was only 15 years old.

Nevertheless, as we have just said, the English poets of that time, generally speaking, only repeated the allegorical expressions of the Middle Ages, and the Italian movement was known only to a few of the leading personages.

Sir Thomas More, who had great admiration for Pico della Mirandola, was very well acquainted with Italian. He brought humanism into the English court, and, helped by Pace, caused the king to silence the Trojans. Sir Thomas Elyot does not exhibit any striking originality, but his literary work illustrates the wide culture and erudition of the court of Henry VIII. He was more influenced than More by Italian philosophy: he was familiar with the works of Pico della Mirandola, of Francesco Patrizi and others; he knew Latin and Greek and wrote a very clear style. Sir Philip Hoby was a friend of Titian and Aretin, and Sir Thomas Hoby was very well acquainted with Italian. Henry Parker translated into

English Petrarch's *Triumphs* and Roger Ascham knew and studied Italian and placed this language next in importance to Latin and Greek. In a word, not only what concerned literature, but everything which had an Italian origin began to be the object of imitation in England.

In fact, at that time what could be more useful to the English language than the Italian influence? How could the English writers improve their tongue if they did not imitate the Italian literature and Petrarch in particular, as many a poet in Italy was then a Petrarchist? Nay, so great was then the admiration for Petrarch in Italy that in the XVI century the number of the editions of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* was more than double the number printed in any other century. Indeed the first edition was printed in Venice in 1470, and 34 other editions were sold before the end of the century. In the XVI century 167 editions have been traced, 70 in the XVII century, 46 in the XVIII and 50 in the XIX.

The admiration for him was great not

only in Italy and England, but throughout all Europe. In France, during Ronsard's life-time, every French poet tried to imitate Petrarch and, in general, the Italians. Ronsard himself very much liked Greek and Italian: he preferred the *Odyssey* to the *Roman de la Rose*, Petrarch to Marot, and in one passage he states with emphasis that Laura lives still throughout the world.

Indeed love is an incomparable subject for poetical inspiration and Petrarch treated it in a masterly way. Although he is still very far from the analysis of emotion with the directness of Heine or De Musset, yet he is the first poet of love who freed himself from allegory and mysticism. The refinement of his ideas is often in striking contrast with that of his century, because really he anticipates the refinement of the Sixteenth. His poems are perfect in form and wonderfully smooth and harmonious: his style is extraordinarily polished and graceful: his thoughts excel in tenderness, delicacy and charm.

So, through the imitation of Petrarch's poetry, the English tongue obtained pre-

cision, balance, polish, refinement, conciseness and dignity; the English poet acquired more learning, more skill in versification and quite a new atmosphere was created for the poet in that country.

All this shows very well how much England was affected by Italian influence, and in what great esteem Italy was held. No one will doubt what we state when it is remembered that the first mask held at court in 1512-13 was in the Italian fashion, and signs of Italian influence were ubiquitous in England during the XVI century.

We have already seen that the Italians were far ahead as geographers and cosmographers and that therefore books of travels were translated into English. We add now that they were esteemed also as historians, so that Henry VII asked Polidore Virgil to write a history of England, a book which afterwards, with the translations of Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's works, had a great influence on the historians of that country.

At that time Italy fascinated England

so much that English nobles came here to study fencing, and many Italian fencing-masters were in London. If this is not enough to demonstrate how much Italy was admired and copied, we may further add that the English adopted Italian fashions in dress, that even Grisone's book on horsemanship was translated by Blundevile, that another book of cookery, *Epulario, il quale tratta del modo di cucinare ogni carne, uccelli, pesci, ecc. al modo di tutte le provincie* was translated into English and widely known in the second half of the XVI century, and that more than three hundred Italian books had the honour of translation into English.

All these facts prove how much England was influenced by Italy in everything, but no doubt this influence was more conspicuous in the literary field than in any other direction, and Petrarch predominated now in England over any other Italian author, both as a humanist and as a poet.

Of course humanism would have made its appearance just the same without

Petrarch, but, as we have already said, our poet accelerated it, and one of the most important points to be noted is that, after the influence of humanism which revealed the beauties of ancient literatures and after the development of the spirit of individuality, the long poems of the Middle Ages could no longer continue. Petrarch was the moving power that tended to bring about a change and the best model to follow; therefore it began to be imitated. Of course humanism had not yet destroyed the old spirit of chivalry and consequently all the ideas of the Middle Ages, but it had spread Platonic ideas in Western Europe and as Petrarch's poetry is allied to these ideas, so, also for this reason, at that time, only his poetry could be earnestly considered and taken as an example.

At its commencement the Petrarchan movement was very slow in England: its language, its ideas did not seem congenial to the English people, and it was laughed at. It began to be appreciated only when many of the Englishmen who had come

in Italy, returned to their native country and associated the name of Petrarch with the greatest names of Latin and Greek authors. Only then the Petrarchan sonnet began to take root in England. At first restricted in the extent of its appreciation it soon spread rapidly, chiefly because the period of preparation had been very long — about 75 years. Then the great ambition of every English writer was to imitate Petrarch. Humanism had already prepared England, and now that country only wanted a more refined form of poetry, a poetry more in accordance with the tendency of modern feelings and the Platonism of the time, a poetry modelled on the style of Petrarch. So it came to pass that both in Italy and abroad a poet was then adjudged good or bad according to whether he could or could not imitate our great author.

The English writers had understood that the lack of refinement in their language could only be overcome by the imitation of Petrarch and the Italian Pe-

trarchists, therefore our poet became the great authority also in England.

There were in Italy other models to imitate, other geniuses to follow: thus in the first half of the XVI century Ariosto and Aretino were renowned chiefly for their satires; in the second half Guarini and Tasso chiefly for the *Pastor Fido* and the *Aminta* which are both connected with Petrarch's poetry; but at the beginning of that century Petrarch alone held the field, and Petrarch became then what we should now call the most popular poet.

Indeed the Renaissance in Italy chiefly concerned painting and sculpture which England did not yet understand, and in the literary field it was impossible to excel Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. As the latter was most in accordance with the ideas of that time, so he alone could be read, studied and imitated. England began to follow him and in the first half of the XVI century we find two of the best English Petrarchists: Wyatt and Surrey.

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Some have called Petrarch « the last of the troubadours », others have called him « the first modern man ». We think that both terms are correct. When chivalry began to decay, its poetry fell into decadence and as Petrarch lived at the end of the age of chivalry, he inherited something from the troubadours, but not much: he is infinitely more modern than any of them, and if we compare his poetry with theirs, we shall see at once the great difference. But this point is not of great interest to us.

After having seen how much Petrarch was studied and admired we want now to know who was the first English poet who fully understood, translated and imitated him: we wish to know who was the first English poet who succeeded in making him understood and appreciated in England and who demonstrated to the English people how much his poetry was superior to that of any previous poet.

No doubt, that English poet was Thomas Wyatt, and the real influence of Petrarch on English literature is first to be seen in his poetry.

Born in 1503, he came to Italy in 1527 with John Russel, and visited Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, Florence and Rome. He must have lived some time in Bologna, for, when going from Venice to Rome, he was taken captive by the imperial forces under the Constable Bourbon, and a ransom of 3000 ducats was demanded for him: but he succeeded in escaping to Bologna.

During his journey he became able to understand the beauties of our language, chiefly those of the Petrarchan sonnets, and he conceived a wonderful admiration for our flourishing literature. He found that the Petrarchists were then the fashionable poets; he found that the admiration for the great singer of Laura was boundless and almost universal; he tried therefore to introduce in his own language (although this was not yet refined enough for Petrarch's gentle expressions) the effects

of this new poetry. He was fully persuaded that only an imitation of Petrarch could give rise to new hopes for English poetry.

He succeeded, and although very famous for his patriotism, yet he is by far more famous for having been the first of the English Petrarchists and for having shown to his countrymen a new field for literature.

After the preparatory period of the XV century, England could now begin to appreciate this poetry, and Leland considered that Wyatt was equal to Dante and Petrarch. This he certainly was not, and no Englishman would now think so. All the Petrarchists, both Italian and of other nationalities, imitated Petrarch where he is less sincere and more artificial. Not one of them had the real genius to perceive the greatest beauties of Petrarch's poetry therefore not one of them could have equalled him. Nevertheless Wyatt both translated and imitated him successfully, although his imagination is simpler and less profound than Petrarch's and although Petrarch's art is inimitable.

Wyatt's position in the history of English poetry is perhaps as important as Chaucer's. Both Chaucer and Wyatt were admirers of the Italian literature, both translated and imitated Italian authors, both studied Petrarch and marked a new era in the English tongue. Had not Wyatt led so busy a life and had he not died so young, he could have added a little more polish to his verses which, we are sorry to say, are rarely smooth and often in striking contrast with those of his master. It could not be otherwise as Wyatt's poetical power was far superior to the means which his language offered for the expression of his ideas.

This striking contrast with his master is in seen in many places. There is in him, as in the old troubadours, the idea of justice in love, an idea which we do not clearly see in our Petrarch. In the sonnet which begins

« My love to scorn, my service to retain »

he says that he will abandon his mistress in consequence of her injustice. We see therefore that he is not a lover in the

style of Petrarch: as a lover he knows his duties, but he often thinks also of his rights. Sometimes he goes so far with his rights that he is not satisfied with a look or a kind word: he longs for much more, and, if this reward for his love and sufferings does not come quickly and promptly, he does not hesitate to say that he will avenge himself.

It seems to us that manliness is the principal quality to be found in Wyatt, and that sweetness or mildness is the principal one to be found in Petrarch. So Petrarch in his 61st. sonnet says that although he is not tired of love, he is tired of hating himself and of desponding: he only wishes to be dead and to have Laura's name written on his tomb.

Wyatt on the contrary says:

« I will not yet in my grave be buried;
Nor on my tomb your name have fixed fast,
As cruel cause, that did the spirit soon haste
From th' unhappy bones, by great sighs stirred. »

Wyatt is a Petrarchist, but he is not quite in keeping with the Italian style;

there is in him more seriousness, more sincerity and less verbosity.

But in spite of these contrasts, we can find many resemblances between these two poets. Wyatt's and Petrarch's poetry is remarkable for the individual energy of their thoughts and that is just the great difference which separates them from the Middle Ages.

In a sonnet Wyatt upbraids his tongue which is not able to express his love, his tears because they spring forth against his will, his sighs because they are tardy when they should burst forth, and, at the end, he says that only his eyes can show his heart.

These lines seem to us like reading Petrarch himself.

Often we meet with the exaggerations of the Petrarchists of his time. So « at one time his love is a galley steered by cruelty through stormy seas and dangerous rocks; the sails torn by the blast of tempestuous sighs, and the cordage consumed by incessant showers of tears: a cloud of grief envelops the stars, reason

is drowned, and the heaven is at a distance. At another it is a spring trickling from the summit of the Alps, which, gathering force in its fall, at length overflows all the plain beneath. Sometimes, it is a gun, which being overcharged, expands the flame within itself, and bursts in pieces. Sometimes it is like a prodigious mountain which is perpetually weeping in copious fountains, and sending forth sighs from its forests: which bears more leaves than fruits: which breeds wild-beasts, the proper emblems of rage, and harbours birds that are always singing. In another of his sonnets he says that all nature sympathises with his passion. The woods resound his elegies, the rivers stop their course to hear him complain, and the grass weeps in dew (1). » Here it seems to us that he is in advance of the Petrarchists of the XVI century.

At times Wyatt imitates Petrarch where the latter is most sentimental. His 20th. sonnet, in which he prays his mistress

(1) Warton.

to accept his heart, since, if she refuses it, he would be very sorry to receive back what she has refused, is but a translation of the 19th. sonnet of Petrarch.

We have already pointed out that all the Petrarchists followed and translated Petrarch where they should least have imitated him, but perhaps that was a necessity for Wyatt whose mother-tongue was not yet refined enough to reproduce Petrarch's best mannerism. This last statement seems to be borne out by the fact that where Wyatt meets with extraordinarily fine verses, he fails to translate them into English, as, for example, in the *terzina*

« Però, s' alcuna volta i' rido o canto
Facciol perch' i' non ho se non quest' una
Via da celare il mio angoscioso pianto. »

which he translated into

« Whereby if that I laugh at any season,
It is because I have none other way
To cloke my care, but under sport and play ».

Again in the translation of the 156th. sonnet, which perhaps has no other merit

than that of ingenuity, and which corresponds to Wyatt's 14th. sonnet, the 5th. and 6th. verses

« A ciascun remo un pensier pronto e rio
Che la tempesta e 'l fin par ch' abbia a scherno »

were not successfully translated into

« At every oar a thought in readiness
As though that death were light in such a case ».

In the same sonnet, the splendid 13th.
verse

« Morta fra l' onde è la ragione e l' arte »

is badly rendered into

« Drowned is reason that should be my comfort »,

where the omission of the word *arte* causes the whole sonnet to lose greatly and contributes to give it a flat and feeble close.

On the other hand the 12th. verse

« Celansi i duo miei dolci usati segni »

is beautifully and vehemently translated into

« The stars be hid that lead me to this pain ».

Certainly the sonnet is not the best form of composition to give expression to Wyatt's ardent feeling: it is rather too elaborate in its structure. So in his translations from Petrarch he found himself constantly at a loss: he began to translate some of Petrarch's sonnets, but he ended them using ideas of his own⁽¹⁾. This fact also proves to us that Wyatt knew he was not able to render adequately his master's creations.

But that is not all. As at the beginning of the XVI century the decadence of literary taste had already begun in our country, so both the Italian and the foreign Petrarchists sought only to preserve the outward form in their composition and therefore they fell into a hard, mechanical and affected style. In that

(1) Cf. the 4th. of Wyatt's sonnets with the 220th. of Petrarch's.

century the most often quoted of Petrarch's sonnets was the 156th., which we have just mentioned and which is certainly not one of the best. It begins so:

« Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio »

and it was translated by Wyatt into that beginning

« My galley charged with forgetfulness ».

But in saying this we do not wish to withdraw any merit from the English Petrarchist. He was and will remain a great poet, studied, praised and admired. In order to see his strength, ardour, manliness and complete freedom from affectation, take his poems written in short verses and in simple metrical form: they are extremely beautiful, although there is always more imagination than art. Art was still backward in England at that time, and art was the great lesson that Petrarch and the Petrarchists taught that nation.

It is not our object to criticise Wyatt's

lyrics, we only wish to compare his poetry with Petrarch's. We have already mentioned that when Wyatt translates or imitates he is not always happy in his choice, and that where he quits his original and tries to show his individual features he is more successful, although even then he produces little which is superior to his translations and imitations.

The sonnets which Wyatt wrote are not many. There are only thirty-one, and sixteen of these are either translated or imitated from Petrarch (1). Furthermore there is the *rondeau* beginning

« Go, burning sighs, unto the frozen heart,

which is translated from the 120th. sonnet beginning

« Ite, caldi sospiri, al freddo core ».

(1) Cf. Wyatt's sonnet 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, (Aldine edition) with Petrarch's sonnet 109, 61, 220, 136, 188, 81, 12, 41, 104, 156, 140, 44, 99, 19, 188, 229.

Sonnets 4, 8 and 13 are only imitations of sonnets 220, 188 and 104.

The *Complaint upon love to reason*, with *love's answer* is, for the most part, a literal translation from Petrarch's 48th. *Canzone*; the *Complaint of the absence of his love* is almost a translation of the 3rd. *Canzone*:

« Si è debile il filo.... »

On the whole Petrarch was never fortunate in is translators. His language is so exquisite, so polished, so chaste, his thoughts so high and delicate that, if it is difficult to find good imitators, it is certainly more difficult to find good translators. His beauties disappear in a harsher tongue and many a greater poet is less difficult to translate.

If we compare accurately the two poets, we find that Petrarch's influence on Wyatt is seen in almost all his poetry: everywhere we see the admiration which the English poet had for his Italian master.

Of course Wyatt's skill is rather poor compared with Petrarch's, and also the conceits he attempted are somewhat clumsy

and ill fitting, compared to his master's. But could it be otherwise? Nothing is perfect at the beginning, and Wyatt was just at the very beginning, but it was a splendid dawn which he heralded, a dawn which was the prophecy of a glorious day.

It does not concern us whether Petrarch was the inventor or only the improver of the sonnet. It is sufficiently interesting to know that through him it became popular not only in Italy, but in France, England, Spain and Portugal, and to record the fact that the first writer who introduced it into England was Wyatt and that this English poet took it from Petrarch.

Indeed in his sonnets Wyatt follows the rules fixed by our Petrarch, except that he ends them with a couplet which considerably spoils the grace of the composition, a defect that every English Petrarchist inherited from him. Moreover his rhymes are often bad, and his metrical effect is not smooth, therefore we can easily understand how the sonnet remained for some time stationary at court where it

had first been introduced, and that only afterwards was it commonly adopted by every poet in England.

Whe think it also our duty to add here that Wyatt was indebted not only to Petrarch, but to several other Italian poets. His 23rd. sonnet is translated from two *Strambotti* of Serafino dell' Aquila. There is some connection between the *strambotto*

« Donna se io dissi mai »

and Wyatt's ode

« Perdie I said it not »;

and the influence of the *strambotto*

« L'aer che sente »

is clearly seen in the ode which begins

« Resound my voice.... ».

Some find the source of the ode

« Where shall I have.... »

in Giusto de' Conti's poems, and that of the ode

« When first mine eyes.... »

in the poetry of Tebaldeo of Ferrara.

Even J. A. Romanello had some influence on Wyatt, and at least one of the sonnets of the English Petrarchist is taken from him.

He is also much indebted to Alamanni for the form of his satires and for the *terza rima*, which he introduced in England with the *ottava rima*, but, we are sorry to state, without success.

But it is not our principal object to consider the influence of other authors, but of Petrarch on Wyatt. Let us see now whether Wyatt, like Petrarch and the Petrarchists, had his mistress, his Laura.

It seems and we believe that many of his poems were inspired by Anne Boleyn, the unhappy queen, whom Henry VIII married only perhaps for the political purpose of securing the friendship of the French king Francis I. After her death the Roman Catholic writers did not

hesitate to say that she had immoral intercourse with Wyatt. Nay, they said worse than that. Some were daring enough to state that the English poet's relations with Anne Boleyn continued up to the time that her favours were sought by King Henry, and add that Wyatt frankly told the king the character of his intimacy with her and warned him against marrying such a lady.

Notwithstanding this the fact remains that at her trial nothing of the kind was said or proved against her, and we think that the king would have been only too happy to have found fresh evidence to accuse her and to justify his crime. We think that the king had no suspicion as to her relations with Wyatt since in 1536, the year in which the queen was executed, Wyatt was knighted; in the next year he was sent as an ambassador to Spain, in 1539 he received a reward from the king, and in 1541 and 1542 he received grants of lands. It is true that on the 5th. of May 1536 he was committed to the Tower, but this was only to ensure his presence as a

witness against the queen; no legal proceedings were taken against him, and on the 14th. of June following he was released, about a month after the queen's execution which took place on the 19th. of May. Some time afterwards he was again committed to the Tower, not certainly for a posthumous vengeance on the part of the king, but because he was charged with traitorous correspondence with Pole and with disrespect to the king.

Basing their statements on these facts many say that Anne was innocent and quite faithful to her husband. We are of this opinion, chiefly because accusations of this kind are usually founded on hearsay, on town-talk, for such intercourse is very difficult to discover, and also because we are not inclined to attribute disrepute to anyone, especially to an unfortunate lady, except on direct evidence.

Therefore we say again we believe that the queen was innocent, but this does not mean that she was not the lady of whom Wyatt sang. This she indeed was, and the best proof is given by Wyatt

himself. Like Petrarch, the English Petrarchist, in a neat epigram, plays upon his mistress's name and says:

« What word is that, that changeth not,
Though it be turnèd, and made in twain?
It is mine Anna, God it wot,
The only causer of my pain. »

And in another passage he clearly indicates who this Anna was:

« *Noli me tangere*: for Cæsar's I am. »

It is true that Anna is a very common name and that Wyatt may not have alluded to Anne Boleyn; it is true also that the idea of belonging to Cæsar may have been taken either from Petrarch or Romanello, but remembering that Wyatt very often saw and spoke to the charming queen, who, if not beautiful, was at least very fascinating, and, coupling these facts with the customs of those days, we are of the opinion that Anne Boleyn was the lady of whom Wyatt sang.

By this statement, as we have already said, we do not mean to put any discredit on that noble lady, either before or after

her marriage. It may be, and most probably is the fact that she always remained faithful, and that Wyatt looked upon her only as an ideal lady, and praised and extolled her just as every courtier of that time used to praise kings and queens, their patrons.

But this is only a secondary point to us and we fear that we have written too much about it; it is of little interest for us to know who his mistress was: it is the poet we have to consider, a word also perhaps on the lover, but not the mistress.

As a poet Wyatt is one of the best Petrarchists. From Petrarch he got his poetical skill, the subjects of his sonnets, his style, his love of refinement and rural enjoyments, his hatred for the vanity and vices of the court. Of course he is not merely a translator and a disciple, he is also, as we have seen, an original poet, and we can guess the pleasure enjoyed by Henry VIII and his very unhappy wife when they heard that beautiful poetry declaimed and accompanied with the lute

for at that time music and poetry had not yet ceased to be combined.

Wyatt marks a change a great change in the progress of English poetry. If we except Chaucer, English poetry before him had only been « didactic in intention and symbolic in form (1) ». Wyatt on the contrary looks to nature and tries and often succeeds in representing it as he sees it with his own eyes and as he feels it in his own heart. He is not the successor of the poets of the Middle Ages; he is the follower of Petrarch: his poetry is his own poetry, the poetry of his own feelings, the poetry of his own ardent thoughts, the poetry of the individual. In fact little by little he was growing independent of any influence and in his *Penitential Psalms*, the first idea of which he owes to Alamanni, he shows great poetical skill. He is almost free from any influence, therefore he is here no longer the disciple who follows the master step by step: he his a master himself.

(1) Courthope.

But Wyatt could not have reached such a degree of perfection without having first imitated Petrarch. Through this great Italian poet, in a short time, he introduced into the English language a wonderful refinement and he became the real master of the English courtly poets, the father of modern English poetry. Still, compared with Petrarch, Wyatt is very deficient: in particular he lacks originality and art, but in the history of English poetry he has one of the first places: his genius is inferior to many others, but not his influence.

In fact the work which he had begun was soon continued and brought to perfection by the poetry of Francis Bryan, Lords Rochford, Vaux, Morley (the translator of Petrarch), and above all by the Earl of Surrey, whom Wyatt certainly knew personally, and about whom we shall now speak.

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* *

John Leland considered Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the poetic successor of

Wyatt and since that time the correctness of this statement has been acknowledged. Let us therefore write something about this poet, who, like Wyatt, is another of Petrarch's disciples and whose poetry is chiefly on the subject of love.

He is supposed to have been born about the year 1517, therefore he was younger than Wyatt. He was in Italy only for a very short time, and he cannot have learned much Italian during his journey in our country and his very short stay in Florence. His master, John Clerke, who had been some time on the continent and who knew Italian pretty well, must have given him a very good education, as he mentions that Surrey made many translations from Latin, Italian, French and Spanish. Perhaps he made them in his early youth to exercise himself in the art of poetry.

The fact is that, according the inclination of those times, he loved the Italian language so much and everything belonging to Italy that in his household he had an Italian jester and Italian

servants. It is certain that he endeavoured to perfect himself in all the accomplishments recommended by Castiglione's *Courtier*. As he came from a noble family, there was in him « the double character of the knight and of the courtier, which is peculiar to the XVI century ». (1) He is therefore the representative of a class, and there is no cause at all for wonder if in his poetry we seem to hear a continual lament for a chivalry which is dying out. In this respect he approaches nearer to the poetry of the Middle Ages than many other Petrarchists, but, on the other hand, his individuality often springs forth in his poetry, so that, in this respect, he is modern, much more modern than his contemporaries.

His master Clerke, Leland, Wyatt and perhaps some Italians who lived at the English court introduced Surrey to the study of Petrarch. Certainly it was in his own nation, where Italy was already in great renown, that he learned to admire

(1) Courthope.

and follow our Petrarch and Petrarchists; it was Wyatt's example which led him in the same direction, it was also, and perhaps above all, the sumptuous court of Francis I, where he lived a considerable time, which gave him a real love for Italian poetry. Italian was then eagerly studied and spoken by the French and even the king himself was very proud of being able to speak our language. Italy was then so much admired and imitated in France that Fontainebleau might have been considered an Italian town.

Perhaps Surrey proved to be more clever than Wyatt in assimilating Petrarch's beauties, but he is not an English Petrarch, as Taine has called him: he is only a good English Petrarchist.

Like Wyatt he knew that his language was lacking in polish or at least inadequate to express such delicate feelings as those inspired by Petrarch, therefore his principal task was to polish it by avoiding the « aureate and mellifluate » terms and by choosing only those approved by

common use. So he gave to his language beauties which it never had before.

In fact the subjects he cherishes are the various moods and inconstancies of love, subjects which require Petrarch's admirable words, phrases and thoughts, and all this could not yet be expressed through the medium of the English language. Indeed in all the songs he addresses to his lady we see, either directly or indirectly, Petrarch's influence.

Not only did he polish his language, but he introduced into England a new style, a style which has dignity and conciseness, two qualities which were in striking contrast with the fashion of the day; he introduced into England the manly style which opens up before the artist new and beautiful paths to follow.

What shall we say of the music which is the sustained accent of his verse? He knew that some change in the English versification had to take place; he undertook to effect it and he succeeded. He determined the laws for English prosody, brought to perfection the iambic metre

and greatly improved the use of rhyme. We may say that since then the English versification has been very little improved. In some degree, modelling himself on Chaucer's example, he became the restorer of modern English poetry and he succeeded in correcting the taste of his nation.

Again, what shall we say of the symmetry of his ideas which so perfectly agree with the symmetry of his phrases? What shall we say of the unity of his compositions? The first sentence is in complete harmony with the last and he seems to be already thinking of the last idea, which is always the strongest, while he is writing the first. By that we mean to say that he chooses a central thought around which he artificially puts a variety of ideas and images, and that, in this point also, he follows Petrarch very closely. Besides, his fundamental thought is always simple and elementary, but, like Petrarch, he often repeats it in many different forms.

Like many other poets of that time Surrey looks more to form than to any-

thing else. We think that he is a lover, a true genuine lover, but in being so he endeavours to imitate Petrarch's manner too closely. If we examine his sonnets, we see that he is less eager about showing the strength of his love than the beauty of his composition, and therefore we see also that he is not a great genius, nor a passionate writer, but a courtier, a lover of elegance, a Petrarchist of the XVI century. His conceits are many, his ill-chosen words, in spite of his selection, are not few, and old and trite expressions are very often to be found in all his writings. Nevertheless we should be considerate to him; when a new art arises, the first artists who follow it can only be imitators and can only listen more to their master than to their hearts.

He, as well as Wyatt, tried the *Terza rima*; in translating the *Æneid* he used a decasyllabic blank verse introduced only a few years before by Ippolito de' Medici and Molza and not yet known or almost unknown in England, but it was Petrarch who had the greatest influence on him,

although he was more akin to our poet in form of thought and in matter than in his material structure. *

Not only did Surrey imitate Petrarch, but he translated a good number of his sonnets, and even where he seems original his phrases and passages are often taken from Petrarch.

So the sonnet

« Love, that liveth and reigneth in my thought »
is taken from Petrarch's sonnet

« Amor, che nel pensier mio vive e regna »

which was translated also by Wyatt.

The splendid sonnet beginning

« Alas! so all things now do hold their peace »
is a free translation of Petrarch's 131st.
sonnet:

« Or che 'l ciel e la terra e 'l vento tace »

And again

« Set me whereas the sun doth parch the green »
comes from

« Pommi ove 'l sol occide i fiori e l'erba ».

The first eight lines of this sonnet are almost literally translated.

His imitations from Petrarch are as many, if not more than his translations.

The main thought of the sonnet beginning

« The golden gift that nature did thee give »

comes certainly from Petrarch's sonnet

In qual parte del ciel, in quale idea »

and it also seems certain that the sonnet beginning

« The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings »

was suggested by Petrarch's sonnet beginning

« Zefiro torna, e 'l bel tempo rimena »

Again Surrey's sonnet

« I never saw my Lady lay aside »

seems to originate in Petrarch's *ballata*

« Lassare il velo o per sole o per ombra »

And these verses

« All thing alive, that seeth the heavens with eye,
With cloak of night may cover, and excuse
Itself from travail of the day's unrest,
Save I, alas! against all other's use,
That then stir up the torments of my breast,
And curse each star as causer of my fate.
And when the sun hath eke the dark opprest,
And brought the day, it nothing doth abate
The travails of mine endless smart and pain.
For then, as one that has the light in hate,
I wish for night more covertly to plain,
And me withdraw from every haunted place,
Lest by my chere my chance appear to plain.
And in my mind I measure pace by pace,
To seek the place where I myself had lost,
That day that I was tangled in the lace,
In seeming slack that knitteth ever most. »

are taken from the beginning of Pe-
trarch's *sestina*

« A qualunque animale alberga in terra »

from his 24th. sonnet

« Solo e pensoso i più deserti campi »

and from his 142nd. sonnet

« Quando mi venne innanzi il tempo e'l loro ».

We could multiply these examples and show that Petrarch was very familiar to him, as here and there we find in Surrey's poetry reminiscences of the Italian lyric poet, but we think we have already clearly demonstrated how much Surrey owes to Petrarch.

Like Wyatt, Surrey did not imitate or translate the best passages in Petrarch, but he follows the Petrarchists of his century. So difficult is it for an artist to get rid of the influence of his time!

We think it our duty to note here that he also owes something to Serafino dell' Aquila and to Ariosto, and that he must have been intimately acquainted with the Italian literature of his time, but he is above all a Petrarchist. And also we must say, as we have already said about Wyatt, that Surrey excels where he succeeds in putting aside Petrarch and the mannerism of the Petrarchists, that is where he speaks the language of his own feelings and of his own heart.

Surrey took from Italy not only the greater part of his poetry, but also the

lady he sang of came from an Italian family:

« From Tuscan came my Lady's worthy race »

She was Elizabeth Fitz-Gerald, called the Fair Geraldine, whom he knew first at Hunsdon, and afterwards, in 1540, he renewed her acquaintance at Hampton, and in that year he began to write, in her praise, the series of sonnets and songs that were first published in *Tottel's Miscellany*, about which we shall presently speak. There he extols her beauty and declares his love for her, and there is no doubt about the name as he mentions her twice, namely in the sonnet just mentioned and in the one beginning

« The golden gift that nature did thee give »

where he addresses her as Garret, a name which the family used.

As in the case of Wyatt, it is unnecessary to say that although Surrey had married Lady Frances Vere several years before, we do not find fault with him or with the lady he sang; their love may

have been, and most probably was wholly Platonic, just as was Petrarch's love for Laura and according to the custom of those times.

To say that Surrey was much influenced by Petrarch and that he owes very much to him does not mean that he always followed his Italian master very closely. There is, of course, some difference between the two poets: in Surrey's sonnets we hardly find any of the metaphysical cast which is seen in the Italian poets of that time and in Petrarch himself. His poetry, which is chiefly confined to sentiment and amorous lamentations, is as simple and natural as his sentiments, and in this respect he is perhaps superior to Petrarch. But, on the other hand, the fact that in almost all his poems he sang his lady's praises, the love he had for that lady, the sorrows and pain she caused him, the fact that his lady was as cold as Petrarch's shows a parallel to the conditions under which the English poet wrote.

It seems also that Surrey was influenced

by Petrarch not only in poetry, but also in religion. Our greatest lyrical poet did not sympathize with the luxury of the papal court, so the three sonnets beginning

« Fiamma dal ciel sulle tue tue trecce cada »

« L' avara Babilonia ha colmo 'l sacco »

« Fontana di dolore, albergo d'ira »

seem to have made Surrey, as well as Wyatt, a vehement champion of the Reformation. Indeed he found in the London people the same defects that Petrarch found in the people of Rome, and on account of his religious ideas he seems to have undergone some persecution and it is quite certain that once he was accused of eating meat in Lent. But this does not concern us here.

As a whole the influence of Surrey's poetry in England is much similar to that of Marot in France. Surrey was not a great genius, but, by following Petrarch, Chaucer and Wyatt, he proved himself to be a man of good taste and judgment. He did not invent new words, he rejected

those which were useless; he did not create new metres, he improved those already existing.

But was this new movement understood by every Englishman, or, at least, by every educated Englishman? Although, as we have seen, Surrey's poems were not published until 1557, yet they were in high reputation during their author's life-time and for many years afterwards, so that, besides being praised by his contemporaries, they were praised by Waller, Fenton and Pope.

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It is impossible now to deny or undervalue the great merits of Wyatt and Surrey. Although the new movement they gave to English poetry spread but little at first, yet in the course of time, through their influence, the poetry of their country was quite transformed and brought to a wonderful perfection.

It is true that Wyatt, although superior

to many writers of his time, is, in many regards inferior to Surrey, yet the perfection and influence of the latter could not have been so great without the former: Surrey continued and improved what Wyatt had begun, and these two poets, bringing to England the new Italian poetic forms of the Renaissance, gave a fresh turn to English taste and poetry.

They may be considered as the introducers of Platonic idealism into England, the first advocates of the Petrarchan influence in the English language and the founders of the Petrarchan school in England. But, as we have seen, they were not Petrarchists by a mere chance: they could not have undertaken the poetical reform, had not it been prepared by preceding generations, but, perhaps most of all, they were encouraged and pushed forward in the direction they chose by the Italian humanist poets who then lived at the English court. Wyatt, and perhaps also Surrey, must have known there the Italian poets Silvestro Gigli, Adriano di Castello and Andrea Ammonio.

It was fortunate for them and for the English tongue: their importance in the literature of their country is just as high as that which Grocyn and Linacre hold in scholarship. Therefore they are called the reformers of English metre and style, the founders of modern English poetry.

Certainly, as we have seen, they are not without defects, and if there is in Wyatt's love-poems a total lack of positive virtue, of distinction, and if in Surrey's we do not find a great change for the better, if they always remain in the same atmosphere of respectable commonplace, we must not reproach them very much: it is impossible to bring anything to perfection in a moment.

Nevertheless, if these two poets have resemblances, they also have points in which they differ from each other. They have not really the same position in literature: Wyatt is the innovator, Surrey is the greater poet: Wyatt is the master, Surrey is the disciple who overshadows the master. If you compare those of Petrarch's sonnets that were translated

by both Wyatt and Surrey, you will at once see the superiority of the latter. Wyatt brought to England the Italian verse forms, he acclimatized Petrarch in his country, and so gave life to the English decaying poetry: on the other hand Surrey brought to his country an artistic taste. We may say that the former rather refined the English bluntness, and that the latter, besides carrying on the refinement begun by Wyatt, made his language fit to express new ideas and delicate feelings. Wyatt had taught Surrey to look to Italy for his models, but he wanted terseness, sweetness and purity of style, three good qualities which are clearly seen in Surrey. Wyatt gives a kind of originality to his thoughts by the metaphysical character of the ideas which he expresses: on the contrary Surrey is preeminent from the grace and elegance of his style, and there is not in Surrey the vehement individuality which is Wyatt's characteristic.

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And now let us say something about Surrey's school.

Wyatt's and Surrey's poems circulated till 1557 only in manuscript form; therefore there could not be many copies of them, and, as they could not be read by many, so they could not be generally admired or imitated.

Ferrers was among the very first imitators of Surrey's poetry. He understood and appreciated all the improvements recently introduced into the English versification, but he did not quite succeed in imitating his master as the harmony of his verses is hardly superior to Lydgate's.

After Ferrers we may mention Churchyard who outlived his poetical renown and who was taught to write poetry by Surrey himself, in whose household he was from 1537 to 1541. He wrote very much, giving care to versification and form; but he was overvalued by his

contemporaries as he was only of secondary rank and now almost forgotten.

Then we shall call the attention of our readers to Sackville to whose genius is due the great reputation of *The Mirror for Magistrates*. This writer followed so closely the improvements introduced by Surrey and modelled himself so much on Surrey's style that his versification stands in real contrast with that of his predecessors.

We could mention here several other writers who belong to the school of Surrey, but as some of them are of minor value, and as we wish, as much as possible, to follow a chronological order, we will now speak about *Tottel's Miscellany*, and we shall consider in their proper places the other poets who followed that school.

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The few years preceding the advent of Elizabeth to the English throne and even the first ten or twenty years of her

glorious reign were very poor in literary productions, religion and politics diverting the minds of the best men from literature.

Happily on the 5th. of June 1557 Richard Tottel, a London stationer and printer, published a collection of poems which is known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. There were printed in that volume 271 poems, 40 of which were written by Surrey, 96 by Wyatt, 40 by Grimald, and the other 95 by Thomas Lord Vaux, John Heywood, William Forest, Francis Bryan, George Boleyn Earl of Rochford and various unknown authors.

It was the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey that was then appreciated in England, and as many of the pieces which were in *Tottel's Miscellany* were written after their style, the book had such a success that on the 31st. of July of the same year a second edition appeared, then a third in 1558, a fourth in 1565, a fifth in 1567 and a sixth in 1574.

It was this book which made known to many Englishmen the beauties of the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey, it was this

book which spread wide in England the influence of Petrarch who really became the leader of the new school the « head and prince of poets all » (1).

From the publication of this book begins in England what we could now call the popularity of the Petrarchan school. Wyatt's and Surrey's poetry which, as we have stated, was already famous during the reign of Henry VIII chiefly among the aristocracy and literary men, became now the fashion, the admiration of every reader and the model for many poets.

It is true that several of the writers in *Tottel's Miscellany* were not Petrarchists, that, to mention only one example, Nicholas Grimald had no knowledge of Petrarch, although he was of Italian origin and although he tried to follow Surrey, but we are quite sure that the success of *Tottel's Miscellany* is wholly due to the Petrarchists, and chiefly to Wyatt and Surrey.

(1) *Tottel's Miscellany*.



It is also true that other poets enjoyed considerable renown at that time without being Petrarchists.

Barnabe Googe although he made an occasional use of conceits and although he calls his lyrical compositions *sonnets*, according to the mediæval use of the word, had no knowledge of the Petrarchan sonnet.

Turberville wrote no sonnets, although he knew Italian very well, and cannot be called a Petrarchist at all, although he borrows ideas from Wyatt and Surrey.

Nor could Whetstone really be called a Petrarchist. Nevertheless he knows Italian very well, imitates Boccace, studies Petrarch and Ariosto and avails himself of their writings so that the poetry of his *Heptameron of Civil Discourses* takes its inspiration from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. This Whetstone was rather famous in his own day; he was soon imitated by many English writers, among whom we

find Robert Greene who wrote good sonnets.

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But, as we have already pointed out, the authors who most prevailed, those who were most read and admired were the Petrarchists, and Petrarch's renown was so high and wide-spread that in many churchyards we find sixteenth century epitaphs where the name of the person mentioned is honoured by being called one of Petrarch's scholars.

Petrarch was then considered the greatest authority and all civilized Europe consulted and studied his works: he was considered the promoter of literature and knowledge, he was styled the best authority of the time, the grand master of love, the best of men, the noblest of lovers and the loftiest of poets. England held him in such high esteem that Lord Morley translated and published, a short time before his death, Petrarch's *Triumphs*; William Thomas, a clerk of the Council of Edward VI,

published a *History of Italy*, and, in 1550, a book the title of which is « *Principal rules of the Italian grammar with a dictionary for the better understanding of Boccace, Petrarch and Dante* », a copy of which is still preserved in the library of the British Museum, and we feel sure that some other books of this kind must have been written before. L

We say this because the period of the history of the English poetry extending from Surrey to Spenser is not very much known, therefore very little can be said. Yet we find that mention should be made of Richard Edwards who was the most popular poet at the court of Queen Mary and who, following the example of Petrarch, Wyatt and Surrey, wrote sonnets which he addressed to some of the beauties of the court of Queen Mary and of Queen Elizabeth. L

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Till now we have mostly spoken of the influence which Petrarch had on writers who flourished before Elizabeth came to

the throne of England. Let us now speak a little of the Elizabethan era, as from the very beginning of the Renaissance up to the time of Elizabeth's death (about 150 years) much of what was written in England was taken from Italy, and our author was held in so great consideration that Gabriel Harvey, speaking in praise of Spenser and of his merit as a poet, called him « an English Petrarch ».

It is true that the best writers of the Elizabethan era disliked not only the literature of the Middle Ages, but also the Italianated Englishman and consequently all the Petrarchan poetry and the excessive refinement which came from Italy; but it was impossible for them to get rid suddenly of the Petrarchan influence and many of the minor poets continued to follow Petrarch and the Petrarchists. In imitation of Petrarch and Surrey the English poet continued to choose his lady, to celebrate her charms and to complain of her cruelty. So Sidney chose *Stella*, Constable *Diana*, Daniel *Delia*, Giles Fletcher *Licia*, Lodge *Phyllis*, Drayton

Idea, Percy Cœlia, not to mention the numerous poets who kept secret the name of their mistress. We see therefore that literature still continued to be inspired by Petrarch, and if we examine the English history of that time we shall see that Italy was still exercising a great influence not only on literature, but also on learning and social life.

During that glorious reign the knowledge of the Italian language spread more and more in England, and, as Ascham believed, it was considered as important as Latin and Greek. Elizabeth, who knew eight languages, was well acquainted with Italian, as was also the Princess Mary. This language was universally taught in England where every Italian fashion continued to be eagerly copied. Journeys to Italy which, as we have seen before, were formerly very frequent, were now thought necessary for the education of a real gentleman and they had a great effect on the imagination of the Elizabethan period, because those travellers saw a country quite different from their own.

In Italy they learned to admire the new poetry, the bright, sweet, lovely poetry of Petrarch which was then so much cultivated here. In fact through the influence of the English Petrarchists the English language had already become refined, the style and metre polished and the rough language of the Middle Ages was quite transformed as it was not sufficient to express the spirit of the new poetry.

Of course, as we have already pointed out, every English poet was not then a Petrarchist. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign literary tastes had begun to change, as is shown by *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, some poems collected and published either in 1576, or in 1578 as Warton says, by Disle, a printer of considerable renown in those days. These poems do not belong to the Petrarchan school, their subjects are not of the kind that Petrarch and the Petrarchists would choose, but they are rather serious compositions which deal chiefly with the Reformation. Perhaps it could not be otherwise as the Refor-

mation of the English Church changed the character and the subjects of English poetry. This collection has only two resemblances with *Tottel's Miscellany*: firstly it is free from affectation, secondly its style is not so coarse as that of Skelton's poems, therefore it appears that all the pieces here collected were written after the English language had been polished by Petrarchan influence.

On the other hand, about the same date, another miscellany was published, the title of which is the *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*. These poems are in striking contrast with those above mentioned and even the title of the collection shows that the Court-poets and the Petrarchists had not yet died out.

It is quite certain that Petrarch was not the only contributor to this refinement and transformation of the English manners, language, style and poetry. Many other Italian books were then read, admired and translated into English. So Castiglione's *Courtier* had already been translated and it exercised its influence on the Tudor

Court. In 1591 Guarini's *Pastor Fido* was printed in Italian in London; in 1596 Della Casa's *Galateo* was translated into English, and this translation contributed very much to the social elevation of those people who could not afford to come to Italy or read Italian.

The influence of Tasso and Ariosto became then wide-spread in England; Machiavelli stirred the imagination of the Elizabethan dramatists and had great influence on them, chiefly on Greene, Marlowe and Shakespeare. We think it worth noting here that the English stage was the least influenced by Italy during the reign of Elizabeth and James I, but that all the same in two thirds of the plays written the plots were taken from Italian authors.

We think it quite certain that this Italian influence, above all that of the Petrarchists, and also, to a certain extent the French influence which was beginning to make its way to England, gave birth to the school of Lyly, to Euphuism. This school is certainly connected with

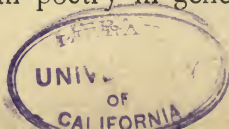
Petrarchism so that many Euphuists could be classed among the Petrarchists.

At first the Euphuists had a good influence, they gathered all the good they could take from Scholasticism, Feudalism, Ciceronianism and Petrarchism, they tried to approach nature, but, in the end, they did not succeed. They degenerated from their first aim, and there was in England a literary movement similar to that of the *Précieuses* in France.

Really even in Euphuus we see the principal defects of the Petrarchists: an exaggerated use of antithesis, similes, paradox, a defect which reached, little by little, the hyperbolical style of Donne and Cowley.

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Our opinion is that the chief poet around whom all the English lyrical poets still gathered, the poet whom they studied and honoured as the greatest authority was still Petrarch. In fact the early Elizabethan poetry in general, but chiefly



the numerous Elizabethan sonnets, in one way or another, owe much to Italy and to Petrarch in particular.

Yes, the Elizabethan sonnets owe their source to Petrarch and his imitators. The English poet may have added something, even beauties of his own, but the form and style of the sonnets always remained the same. In these compositions there is always the same relation between the lady and her lover: every lady resembles Laura, every lover resembles Petrarch: she is always cold, cruel, unfeeling and indifferent to her lover, but always beautiful and virtuous; he is always timid, unworthy of her, and his faithfulness to her is beyond all doubt. In all these sonnets the external beauty of the mistress absorbs more the attention of the poet than does the greatness and richness of her mind. She was rather a thing than a person, she had no individuality, no life; she was, to use the language of those days, a star, a sun, but she had no feeling.

Take as an example of this poetry

the collection *Zepheria* which was published in 1594 and it will at once be seen that Petrarch was still largely imitated, although here the sonnet of our best lyrical poet is also blended with the pastoral of Sannazaro.

In fact the author of *Zepheria* is an admirer of Sidney, Daniel and Drayton, and although there is much difference between this collection and *Tottel's Miscellany*, yet we may venture to say that Petrarch's influence had not yet ended in England, but it was still very active: we may say that, between 1589 and 1596, Petrarch might be called the prince of English literature.

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Moreover in the last ten years of the XVI century there was a great lyrical revival in England. In fact Daniel's *Delia*, Drayton's *Idea*, Watson's *Passionate centurie*, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* were published between 1590

and 1596. Besides Watson's *Tears of Fancie*, Barne's *Divine Centurie* and Fletcher's *Licia* were published in 1593, Barnfield's *Cynthia*, Constable's *Diana* and Percy's *Sonnets of the fairest Cœlia* appeared in 1594, Griffin's *Fidessa* and Smith's *Chloris* were presented to the public in 1596, and numerous sonnets by unknown authors were published about that time.

• It is very easy to find out the cause of this lyrical revival. As the sonnet is the best way of expressing a single emotion, no wonder if, at the beginning of a literary period the characteristic of which is the most intense personality, the poets undertook to write sonnets, the composition which was the fittest for the expression of their thoughts. In fact the number of the sonnets written in the last ten years of the XVI century exceeds that of any other decade in the history of English literature.

It is only to be regretted that all the sonnets, or, to speak with more precision, all the enormous bulk of the non-dramatic

poetry of the XVI century strove to represent the quintessence of things rather than facts as they actually were. For the most part the Elizabethan sonneteers have no poetical invention, no poetical fire, they are cold, lifeless and they deserve to be called, as Pope did call them « the Muses' hypocrites ». The theme they chose to treat of had already been exhausted by preceding generations.

Of course in all these compositions Petrarch is neither translated nor imitated as in the works of Wyatt and Surrey, but he is always the dominant spirit: no one of these authors can be considered exempt from his influence.



Perhaps, passing from Italy to England, the Petrarchan sonnet lost some of its beauty and strength, but the groundwork is always the same, it is always Petrarch who dominates it: Petrarch so dominates everybody that Ascham in his *Schoolmaster* wrote: « Our Englishmen Ital-

ianated have more in reverence the Triumphes of Petrarche than the Genesis of Moyses ». We may also add that they always preferred a tale of Boccaccio to a story from the Bible. And it must have been so because through the Renaissance mankind obtained much more freedom than in the Middle Ages: moral restraints were therefore taken away and, as a consequence, licence and excesses came.

Nevertheless this corruption did not come through Petrarch who never wrote any word which could offend even the most educated and refined girl. So Petrarch continued to be the companion and the admiration of lovers and the ideal of many a poet. This is so true that Spenser published his *Vision of Petrarch* about the year 1569.

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Let us now speak of some authors in particular, namely those of the Elizabethan era who are in one way or another connected with Petrarch.

First of all we find a great poet who belongs to the school of Surrey. Sidney wrote when the English verse was still developing and was trying to improve itself in following the example of the classics. No doubt he knew Italian very well and read and studied many Italian authors, chiefly Sannazaro. He travelled very much: in Italy he saw that our monarchs had abandoned their old heralds and given their places to scholars, poets and diplomatists, and he was enthusiastic over the change which had taken place. But as Italy was then much advanced in this way, so the contrast between the Middle Ages and the ideas of the XVI century produced in many high-minded Englishmen feelings which are often very well seen in Sidney's poetry.

We know that he protested against being called a Petrarchist, although he followed the rules of the Petrarchan school so much that Spenser called him the Petrarch of his time. Some critics say that his sonnets are perhaps more passionate than Petrarch's, others state just

the contrary, but, as a whole, they are stringently modelled after his. If we compare the sonnet beginning.

« I on my horse, and Love on me doth try »

with Petrarch's sonnet

« Passa la nave mia calma d'oblio »

we see at once that the former is but an imitation of the latter.

We speak only of his sonnets because it is chiefly through them that Sidney is most closely connected with our author, and through them he showed that this kind of composition is peculiarly suited to the genius of the English language, although not perhaps in the severer Petrarchan form. He made frequent use of conceits and of the various tricks of the Petrarchan school so that he may be called a Petrarchist. Another most valuable proof for our statement is that his Stella had all the qualities of Petrarch's Laura: beautiful, but cold, almost cruel.

Both these ladies had an equal mission, both awakened in the souls of their lovers the same feelings, what was best and

most typical in them; both obtained immortality from and gave immortality to two poets who presented their nations with masterpieces which cannot become obsolete as long as their languages live.

There are also these two resemblances between Petrarch and Sidney. When Sidney does not write about Stella, he obtains a greater degree of perfection, just as when Petrarch, from time to time, does not sing about Laura, just as Wyatt and Surrey do when they do not sing about their ladies. Finally, like Petrarch, after having lived in the luxury of the court, Sidney wished to retire in a lonely place in the country and he sings:

« Well was I while under shade,
Oaten reeds me music made,
Striving with my mates in song;
Mixing mirth our songs among.
Greater was the shepherd's treasure,
Than this false fine, courtly pleasure ».

Certainly, in spite of all the imitations and resemblances, Sidney's poetry is somewhat different from Petrarch's: there

seems to be in the former more life, more vigour, but less art. Sidney's poetry « was younger and fresher, more natural and less restrained ⁽¹⁾ » than Petrarch's. And there is another difference: in his sonnets Sidney gives to history a more important place than Petrarch or any Petrarchist.

We have just pointed out that in Sidney's poetry there is less art than in Petrarch's, but we do not mean to say that the English poet was not an artist: he was, and a good one; only he is inferior to Petrarch, because Petrarch's art is unattainable. Sidney is an artist because his poetry has passion, simplicity and thought; because his style is clear and concise, which is not to be found in any other Petrarchist. He does not succumb to the great danger of many sonneteers and chiefly of those of the Petrarchan school, namely to the effort of appearing always a great artist and of showing how artistically he can express his thoughts: his art is almost concealed

(1) Einstein.

and never shown at the expense of thought and feeling.

Sidney was a true artist, we repeat, and, to prove that, it would be enough to consider that he saw the defects of Euphuism which was just then taking root in England; he avoided them and tried to remain faithful to Petrarch. Besides his great good sense as an artist was not limited only to literature: in Venice he became acquainted with Tintoretto and Paul Veronese, and from them he learned to admire the Italian art of painting in which no Englishman, travelling in Italy before him, had taken any interest. Up to that time the English could appreciate only literature, architecture and a little sculpture.

He was a true artist: we cannot be mistaken as this opinion is predominant since his time, and Samuel Daniel, who had travelled very much in Italy, said that Sidney and Spenser were the equal of the Italian poets. More than this, he thought that the English poets were superior to them and he writes:

« That the melody of our sweet isle
Might now be heard to Tyber, Arne and Po;
That they might know how far Thames doth outgo
The music of declined Italy ⁽¹⁾ ».

No doubt there was not too much pride in these statements because during his life-time Sidney was held in such great renown even abroad that our Giordano Bruno, whom he had known in 1584, dedicated to him his *Spaccio della Bestia Trionfante* and afterwards his *Eroici Furori*.

Certainly in the time of Sidney the English language was already being refined, English poetry was becoming improved, therefore, since his genius was superior to that of Wyatt and Surrey, his obligations to Petrarch were less direct; nevertheless he is still a Petrarchist and we should class him among the best.

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Another poet of the Petrarchan school is Thomas Watson who, following the lot of almost all the Petrarchists was

(1) Epistle to the Countess of Pembroke.

much more famous during his life-time than now. He was a great humanist, but his vogue and renown was chiefly due to his *Passionate century of love*, a series of sonnets which had the honour of being closely studied by Shakespeare and other contemporaries. In spite of their frigidity and imitative quality, they actively influenced the form and subject of later sonnets of the century and it was as a sonneteer that Watson left his chief mark in English literature.

But where do his art and sonnets come from? Mostly from Italy, we answer, and chiefly from Petrarch.

We know that Watson studied Italian with fervour, that he admired our literature, that he began his literary career by translating Petrarch's sonnets into Latin in order to amuse himself, and also that he translated Tasso's *Aminta* into English. He himself states that he took eight sonnets from Petrarch, twelve from Serafino dell' Aquila, four from Strozza and Ronsard, three from Firenzuola, without mention on our part as to what

he owes to Poliziano, Girolamo Parabosco and several others. It is true that he took only eight sonnets from Petrarch, but when we consider that almost all the other authors from whom he took the sources of his songs were more or less Petrarchists, nobody will find fault with us if we say that it is Petrarch's art which Watson endeavours to follow, and if we call him a Petrarchist.

In fact he had a great admiration for our author; he considered himself one of his successors, and all his numerous admirers thought that he could write poetry as good as his master's. As we have said, he was very popular in his time and he owed all his popularity chiefly or rather only to the reintroduction of the Petrarchan sonnet, therefore he was rightly called the reviver of Petrarchism in England.

We have seen that for some years before and after the accession of Queen Elizabeth English literature was not in a flourishing condition. After the death of Wyatt and Surrey the sonnet had been

almost abandoned in England, perhaps because many did not think it necessary to import this new composition, or because it was not understood, or even because it is very difficult to write good sonnets. Watson had the merit of its revival as many of his sonnets were written and perhaps also published before Sidney's, and we think that, but for him, the English poets would not have written so many sonnets in the last part of the XVI century.

We need hardly say that he has all the defects of the Petrarchan disciples. As love was his principal subject, so he had little variety, he could not escape monotony, extravagant metaphor and exaggeration. His poems lack passion, they do not reflect any personal feeling; they are only dexterous imitations of classical or modern French and Italian poems. Besides, the songs which he calls sonnets are not really so, as they are made up of eighteen lines. We must also add that he was neither a great man nor a great poet; he did not take from Italy and

from Petrarch what he ought to have taken. He never aimed at originality; his only aim was erudition and we may consider his poetry as a mosaic of Italian phrases, although it is the accomplished work of a cultivated and well read scholar.

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We have had several times the opportunity of mentioning Spenser: he is another great English poet who owes much to Italy and to Petrarch. It seems to us that it could not be otherwise: his education was imbued with Platonism, just as was that of every Petrarchist, and living at a time when the literary field in England was divided into three different parties, the admirers of classical antiquity, the Euphuists and the Petrarchists, he was equally under the influence of each of them, as may be seen in all his works. As to Italy we could say that, after Ariosto, the author who most influenced him was Petrarch. Like Petrarch he

preferred the solitude of the fields to the life of the court, and he met in Lancashire the lady indispensable to every Petrarchist, his Laura: « Rosalynd, the widow's daughter of the glen ».

Of course Spenser always sets his face against the affectation of his time, against the trivial literature of Italy as well as against Lyly's Euphuism, and he tries to follow Chaucer and Ariosto, but he so much admired our author that about the year 1569 he published his *Visions of Bellay and Petrarch*.

We can scarcely call him a Petrarchist, but even in his *Faerie Queene*, his principal work and the one which is less connected with our lyrical poet, there is much of the Platonism of Petrarch. Therein he is much more connected with Ariosto, whom he aimed to excel, and he is therefore called the English Ariosto although his poetry is Italian rather in its outward form than in its inward spirit. No

Spencer approaches nearer to Petrarch in his sonnets where he follows the rules of Sidney, and therefore he is somehow

connected with Petrarch. Raleigh proves that we are right in our assertion, as in a splendid sonnet to Spenser he says that the great Italian poet will be jealous of him in his grave.

Certainly there is much exaggeration in that, but there is no doubt that Spenser's sonnets are Italian, or at least more or less Italianated, just as well as Sidney's. We venture also to say that Spenser was not a sonneteer. The fact of his having written some sonnets in blank verse is the best proof of our statement, and besides we may note that his sonnets are always deficient in body, frigid in tone and altogether wanting in the grace of manner we might naturally expect from the great author of the *Faerie Queene*.

We cannot call him a Petrarchist, we have said, but he has the defect which is inherent in Platonism and in every Petrarchist: he intellectualizes his emotion so much that it is emotion no longer.

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Proceeding in chronological order, after Spenser, we should speak of Henry Constable who was a real Petrarchist. His poetry is of the conventional type, but it is more tolerable than Watson's and it may be taken as the type of the English writers who imitated the later Italian Petrarchists. He is the sighing and languishing lover, his Laura, of whom we do not know whether she really existed or was an imaginary personage, is the cold, cruel mistress. His sonnets, 23 in number, are full of affectation and exaggeration: « his mistress's eye was the glass through which he saw his heart; his own eye was a window through which she might see his (1) ». Who does not see in this thought a Petrarchist of the XVI century?

(1) Sonnet N. 5.

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And Shakespeare, even the great Shakespeare could not escape the influence of the Petrarchists and therefore of Petrarch himself, but, as we do not want to be misunderstood, we say at once just what we said about Spenser: Shakespeare is not a Petrarchist and perhaps his poetical vein is more akin to Dante's than to Petrarch's.

In order to show that he is not a Petrarchist it is enough to compare his sonnets with those of Watson, Barnes, Fletcher, Daniel, Drayton and other contemporaries: their superiority is seen at once with the certainty that they do not come from the same source of inspiration. Besides Shakespeare did not follow all the rules which Petrarch constantly applied, although perhaps he may have read, if not all, at least some of Petrarch's sonnets. We say so because we are of the opinion of those who think that Shakespeare knew Italian, if not to per-

fection, doubtless in such a degree as to be able to discern the drift of an Italian poem or novel. Were it otherwise it would be very difficult to explain how he could find not less than fourteen of his dramas on Italian fiction.

But of course it is not of his dramas we are going to speak, although the lyrical element peculiar to his time is to be seen in all his plays: it is of his sonnets that we wish to say something.

Certainly there is some relation between his sonnets and Petrarch's. The dominant idea of his 21st. sonnet is taken from the 3rd. sonnet in Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, and we have seen that Sidney was a Petrarchist. The thought developed in his 23rd. sonnet, namely the inability of love to express itself in words occurs over and over again in provençal poets, and is found in Petrarch's 41st. sonnet, which, as we have seen, was translated also by Wyatt. There is also some connection between his 26th. sonnet and that of Petrarch beginning

« Amor, che nel pensier mio vive e regna ».

We could say that the sonnet urging a friend to marry and the other which expresses a complaint about the robbery of a mistress are probably fictions in the Italian style.

In fact at first Shakespeare was very fond of the Italian sonnet although afterwards he ridiculed it. He adhered to the simple form introduced by Surrey and we have seen that he studied Watson's sonnets which came chiefly from Petrarch. Again, as Petrarch wrote about his own feelings for the lady he loved, so perhaps Shakespeare derived the subject-matter of his sonnets from his personal relations with men and women at court. Therefore as the inward life of Petrarch is mostly given by his sonnets to Laura, so Shakespeare's sonnets bear to his biography a relation wholly different from that borne by the rest of his literary works.

It appears to us that it is impossible to deny the influence of Petrarch and the Petrarchists on Shakespeare. The Elizabethan love-poets made use of the Platonic idealism of the Petrarchan school,

and Shakespeare adopted its phraseology in his sonnets where we find much which is common to the other sonneteers of the day: his expressions are conventional, his thoughts are usually more condensed than anywhere else and obscure conceits are more numerous than in all his other works. In a word his language is so figurative that it becomes difficult to understand and it is even quite unintelligible here and there.

But is there any real emotion in Shakespeare's sonnets? Before answering this question we think it useful to mention that only just at that time did the sonnet begin to emancipate itself from the tendency to sing the praises of woman as a perfect being according to the poet's ideal, and from the tendency of joining to his earthly love some vague ideas of spiritual love. It is therefore easy to see that the sonnet was limited to a particular subject, and if to that we add that the spirit of the chivalry of the Middle Ages was decaying, we can easily guess that the language to use in this kind of com-

position could only be cold, mechanical and conventional. Consider the great difference which exists between the enthusiasm of Petrarch for Laura and that of Fletcher for Licia and also perhaps that of Surrey for the Fair Geraldine and the truthfulness of our statement will be at once admitted.

As every artist is, to a certain extent, the product of his own time, so Shakespeare could not escape this universal law, therefore his critics are divided into two parties. Thomas Tyler, Courthope and many others say that his sonnets are sincere; several others, among whom we find Lee, do not agree with this opinion. Karl Elze and E. Stengel say that perhaps Shakespeare wrote his sonnets to exercise his fancy and to amuse his friends, which leads us to the opinion that his sentiment was fictitious. But, to express our modest opinion, we think that as Dante and Petrarch could not have written so well if their feelings had not been genuine, so Shakespeare could not have presented mankind with his beautiful sonnets had

he not really felt what he wrote, and we really think that his passion was born of the heart and not of the head.

But by whom were these sonnets inspired? To whom were they addressed? They were first published in 1609 and dedicated to a person whose name began with the initials W. H., which, for about seventy years afterwards, were believed to stand for a woman's name. Critics have now changed their opinion and they are inclined to think they were addressed to a male friend, and this is not improbable when we consider the Platonism of the time. But then, why did not Shakespeare write the name in full? The fact of using initials only might cause even the least carping mind to think of a woman rather than of a man. However that may be, the fact remains that the woman of Shakespeare's sonnets is not like Laura, nor is she like any lady of the Petrarchists. She is not a perfect beauty, or a beauty womanly perfect, but she has the power of fascinating the poet almost in spite of himself. It may be that

Shakespeare never sympathized with any Laura, and, as he wrote his sonnets at different periods of his life, perhaps they were, as we have already suggested, inspired by several persons, both male and female, although they were dedicated only to one.

If Shakespeare had no Laura, or, at least, if he did not know how to love his lady and sing of her after the manner of the Petrarchists, he also did not know the somewhat complex system of rhyme adopted by Petrarch in his sonnets and by nearly all the best English sonneteers. Only rarely a single sonnet forms an independent poem, and, as in the sonnets of Sidney, Spenser and Drayton, the same thought is pursued continuously through two or more.

It is needless to say that Shakespeare's lyrics do not form his principal glory, but they outshine all those of other authors. It has been said that the sonnet writers of the Shakespearian age have left little really memorable work, nevertheless that little, in our opinion, cannot be neglected

by a conscientious student of English literature.

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As is seen, we have till now dealt chiefly with first-class authors, but by their side we have many secondary ones, who, although they do not owe many obligations to Petrarch, are yet connected with his school and therefore with him. Many English sonneteers of that time belong to this class, but we shall mention only a few, and first of all we meet with Daniel.

As a sonneteer he deserves a rather high place among the Petrarchists. Like many other poets of his day he travelled in Italy and studied the literature of our country. It has even been said that his sonnets almost surpass those of Shakespeare for sweetness of rhythm, delicacy of imagination and purity of language. What is quite certain is that his style is modern in comparison with Shakespeare's.

The sonnets he published in a volume

entitled *Delia*, his mistress' name, were much admired by Shakespeare and many other poets. Even in the last century Coleridge called Daniel « admirable ».

Notwithstanding this flattering judgment seems to have changed to-day and many critics see in these sonnets, as well as in Drayton's, only some studied courtly compliments to a literary patroness, and do not find in them anything beautiful and new, except perhaps the grace and literary skill of some of the passages.

Another poet who is closely connected with Sidney, and therefore with Petrarch, is Lodge. Although he follows Lyly, yet in his lyrics he appears to be also the disciple of Sidney. It is true that his sonnets, just as those written by many English authors, are not of the ordinary metrical form; it is also true that he approaches ever more and more to the French authors, chiefly to Desportes and Ronsard, but he is also connected with Italian authors and with Petrarchists in particular.

Unhappily in his time the Petrarchan sonnet had ceased to produce anything

new. Lodge only introduces double rhymes and fresh mechanical combinations of sound. He was not a great poet, he was only an imitator. Even the title of his *Philis honoured with pastoral sonnets, elegies and amorous delights*, published in 1593, shows us how near to the Petrarchists he is, and in his *Margarite* he avowedly imitates the style of Dolce, Pascale and Martelli. Also Ariosto and Guarini were familiar to him, as he was well read in modern and ancient literatures.

All the early pieces and especially the sonnets of Barnfield are dedicated to a sentiment of exaggerated friendship and the Petrarchan influence is seen in almost all his poems.

We could continue and say that Petrarchan influence is seen in Drayton. He is a Petrarchist because his lady, Idea, is very similar to Petrarch's Laura; he is a Petrarchist because his sonnets lack natural sentiment and emotion, because there are traces of mechanical workmanship in his poetry, because some of his sonnets are based on conceits, because

in some of his works his style is monotonous, and finally because, when he ceases to pay compliments, he becomes a better poet.

Some critics have charged him and Daniel with imitation, and, in our opinion, they are right, but we point out that every Petrarchist is an imitator, and that we could speak also more generally and say that every disciple is an imitator of his master. Indeed we may say that first Surrey and then Daniel were his literary prototypes, but we see also that his poetry is connected with Constable's and even with Shakespeare's.

We are sorry to state that although Drayton wrote very much, in spite of his great ingenuity and versatility, in spite of the influence he had on his contemporaries, like every Petrarchist, he left very little which posterity could praise. He endeavoured too much to please the court, and the court was then growing too frivolous.

Italian influence and chiefly Petrarch's and Guarini's influence is seen also in

William Drummond. It is known that this learned poet, an inventor of harmony in English verse, between 1606 and 1614 read in their original language most of the best Italian, Spanish and French literary works, and this reading, coupled with the knowledge he had of English literature, made him one of the best lyrical poets of his day so that some critics have ranked him very little below Spenser.

As in his lyrical poems he follows the rule of Sidney, inasmuch as some of them were written in honour of Mary of Cunningham to whom he was engaged, so we may call him a Petrarchist, but he is not of the school of Daniel and Constable, as in his sonnets there is much, more sincerity and passion.

And the same influence is clearly seen in Southwell who shows much genuine emotion, but he takes so little from Petrarch's school that he can hardly be called a Petrarchist. The same influence is seen in Tofte who wrote most of the stanzas of his *Laura* in Italy; in Percy, Griffin,

Smith and many others who wrote sonnets and love poems.

But we think we must close this list, as it is not our object to make a dictionary of the Petrarchists, and also because we have arrived at the end of the Petrarchan influence.

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As in other things, so in politics, literature, painting, it always happens that a novelty finds at once many strong enemies, but, if the innovation is good, it finds also strong supporters who soon overcome their enemies and conquer. Of course, as everything in this world is born, grows and dies by small degrees, the Petrarchan school was subject to the same rise, popularity and decline. Even in France, where its influence had been perhaps stronger than in England, a steady and powerful reaction had begun against the Petrarchists.

The first symptoms of a revolt against

Italy began, as we have already pointed out, very early in the XVI century when the English began a strife against the foreign merchants who had invaded England and taken possession of all the commerce. They were mostly Italians, and therefore the movement was chiefly against Italy, but, as not Italian commerce alone dominated in England, so the revolt was soon spread against the other branches of Italian activity and zeal.

Indeed, from the very beginning of the XVI century, learning began to decay in Italy. Grocyn and Linacre, who had studied in Italy, were by the Italians themselves considered as their successors, and Italy began to bemoan her past greatness. So, many Englishmen began to go to Italy, not to learn, but to amuse themselves, as the vices of the Italians were already known in England where satirists, scholars and moralists began to write or speak against our country. The Italians began to be unwelcome in England, and many Englishmen saw great danger in the translation of Italian books. Erasmus

acknowledges that many went to Italy in order to learn and returned only with bad habits. It was also stated that the English got only three things from Italy: « a naughty conscience, an empty purse and a weak stomach ». Ascham, who gave a very honourable place to the Italian language, said that he saw more wickedness in Venice in nine days than in nine years in London. Sidney, about whom we have already spoken and shall speak again presently, and many others recommended avoiding Rome as a dangerous place.

There is perhaps much exaggeration in all this, but we cannot deny the fact: Italy was decaying. The sack of Rome by the Constable Bourbon was a great blow to her and the misgovernment and tyranny of her princes was another and heavier one.

Again, prior to the death of Henry VIII England had taken all she wanted from Italy and in order to have an idea of the animosity which then existed in England against our country it is sufficient

to state that some of the Italian servants whom Surrey kept in his household were retained as spies and that this circumstance went against him at the trial which led him to the scaffold.

Besides, there was at that time a lack of artistic interest in England. The religious contest between Henry VIII and the Papal See occupied the attention of all and spread hatred against the Italians who stood faithful to the Pope, and although the Italian influence lasted also during the Elizabethan age and even later, yet no Italian artist of any real eminence went to England during that long and prosperous reign.

From the death of Henry VIII began the real strong reaction against Italy, not only on account of the religious contest, but also because just at that time the exaggeration of Italian manners brought to England began to appear very clear to every Englishman. It is true that Petrarch continued to be read, admired, imitated and translated, but his influence in England was dying out.

That, too, is a fact which can be easily explained, even independently of the considerations we have already given, if we only consider that the Elizabethan era was for England a time full of untiring energy and not of frivolity and that just at that time court-wits and gallants wrote poetry without any aptitude and therefore without any probability of success.

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In fact we have already seen that Sidney had begun to write against the Petrarchan school, although he never really escaped its influence in spite of himself. In his *Defence of poetry* he complains of the lack of sincerity and fire in love-poems; he complains of exaggerated and affected diction and of misure of simile, defects which are to be found in every Petrarchist. In all his poetry we find that he succeeds in avoiding the commonplaces of court poetry, and he shows us that to sigh with every word produces less effect than plain

speaking in expressing what is really felt. All these thoughts were heavy blows to the Petrarchists. Lastly we shall quote a direct allusion to Petrarch taken from his 15th. sonnet:

« You that poore Petrarch's long-deceased woes
With new-borne sighes and denisen'd wit do sing,
You take wrong wayes » ...

Gascoigne who was contemporary with Sidney, and who, like Sidney, belongs to the school of Surrey, calls himself « Chaucer's boy and Petrarch's journeyman », although he is almost free from Petrarchan influence. He very much admires the poetry of the Italian Renaissance; he admits having translated something from our author, and Koepffel calls him « an imitator of Petrarch ». He translates into English *I Suppositi* of Ariosto, he presents, in his great versatility, some of the features of the Italianated Englishman, but he approaches rather to Euphuism than to Petrarchism.

Like Surrey he wrote sonnets, but on

the one hand he is more connected with the mediæval poetry, as the spirit of allegory predominates in his works, and on the other he is more modern than the Petrarchists whose fall he seems to foretell.

The fame of Barnabe Barnes rests on his love-poems and his sonnets are somewhat fervent and also richly coloured, although they suffer from self-elaboration and affectation, which are the faults of the age and chiefly of the Petrarchists who endeavoured to be original by inventing new metaphors. But it was impossible to succeed in writing anything good by following this path which had already been too much trodden. Barnes, with the exception of a few pieces, only produced a mixture of nonsense and unpleasant matter which well deserved to be ridiculed by Marston.

Also Francis Mere, who was twelve years old when Gascoigne died, abandons the Italian literature and bends himself towards the French. He writes euphuistically, he prides himself on the free

use of similes, he acknowledges obligations to numerous classical writers, but we cannot say that he and his contemporary William Clarke owe anything to Petrarch. The Petrarchists were beginning to become extinct.

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To speak the truth, among many good qualities, Petrarch had his defects. The principal one is the excess of refinement, the consequence of which is removal from real life. In Petrarch, and in all the Petrarchists there is a lack of emotion, a defect which led to the use of a great variety of metaphors which brought about the exaggerations of the XVI century. As Petrarch chose the sonnet to express his thoughts, so he was compelled to remain « within a narrow range of ideas and feelings (1) » and therefore he was compelled to repeat himself and to make efforts in order to avoid monotony. So he used too often the words eyes, hair,

(1) Einstein.

tears, sorrow, fire, cold, star; so sometimes he falls into rhetoric and extravagance. But both the Italian and the English Petrarchists went further: their vagueness, diffuseness, prolixity, tautology and lack of taste were extreme in the XVI century, and although their defects saved them from plagiarism, yet they led them to mannerism, consisting of errors of taste, abuse of metaphors, antitheses, puns, conceits, display of erudition and over employment of mythology.

In fact the efforts of the Petrarchists were directed rather to form than to originality of expression, they wanted ingenuity and skill rather than learning and imagination, and if you compare one Petrarchist with another, you will find that they are much the same, that they used very nearly not only the same style, but the same metaphors, we might say even the same words, so that their similarity was not only in spirit, but also in expression. It could not be otherwise, as their poetry sprang forth from the same ideas and conditions.

Some modern critics make these defects in Petrarch worse than they really are. They say that he had no true love for Laura and that he was cold, selfish, self-conscious. They believe that he does not sing Laura, but that he himself is the real subject of his poems, as he always longs to be considered a victim of love and he never forgets himself. Some say that he himself doubted his love for Laura and quote the two lines of the 102nd. sonnet:

« S' amor non è, che dunque è quel ch' i' sento?
Ma s' egli è Amor, per Dio, che cosa e quale? »

and they add that the answer is quite simple: Vanity, vanity, vanity.

We are pleased to differ from them. How could we agree with this view if Petrarch was faithful to Laura for all his life? if even after her death he continued singing of her?

There is of course a great deal of self-consciousness and vanity in Petrarch: he longed for honours and he felt that

he deserved them, but this assertion of ours does not mean that his love for the lady he sings was mean hypocrisy. It is true Fletcher wrote that a man « may write of love and not be in love, as well as of husbandry and not go to the plough », but we are not of this opinion and we think that this view cannot be entertained for one moment. It is enough to read and comprehend all the above-mentioned sonnet in order to see that Petrarch really loved Laura, and that even the first two lines do not mean what some critics think. From all his sonnets his true love for her appears most clearly. We can agree with De Sanctis who says that in Petrarch the man is less than the artist, but where is the artist who has no defect both as an artist and as a man? Perfection does not belong to this world, and as for Petrarch we ought to be very pleased to admire the artist if we cannot always admire the man. We should bear in mind that he is a very modern man, that he is made up of contradictions and that he is the real ancestor of

Hamlet and Faust, Rousseau and Childe Harold.

Besides if his lyrics, as Shelley says, are « as spells which unseal the inmost unchanted fountains of the delight which is the grief of love », if he put all Europe in a new and better sphere of human activity, we should only be sorry that such men do not oftener appear on the stage of this world.

Certainly a renown which has been existing these six centuries cannot be diminished or blemished or stained to-day even in spite of the defects we may see in Petrarch's poetry. As he is inimitable in his good qualities, and as the Petrarchists imitated their master chiefly in his defects, so what can be said of the Petrarchists, cannot be said of Petrarch. The popularity of almost all the former waned long ago even during their lifetime, because their defects predominated over their good qualities; that of the latter is not yet dead and shall live because his good qualities predominate very much over his few defects.

Again, about the beginning of Elizabeth's reign Puritanism grew very much in England and began to point out and satirize the Italianated Englishman, and to denounce Italy, in spite of her attractions, as the fiercest of its enemies. Also the inquisition frightened many Englishmen, who returned to their country to tell of its excesses, and our nation, that was considered the best in the world only a few years before, began now to be thought the worst.

The last and most powerful blow to her was given by the appearance in the literary field of the numerous geniuses of the Elizabethan era, and also by the destruction of the Invincible Armada in 1558. These events taught every Englishman how much England could rely upon herself and brought home to every Englishman how much he could do by himself. From that time English literature began to be freed from Petrarch's influence.

So from the very beginning of the XVII century England had very little or

nothing to learn from Italy, and the Italian influence on English literature was either stationary or in its wane.

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It is strange to note that towards the end of the XVI century the authors who most cried out against Italy are those who were most influenced by Italian literature.

Marlow who owes so much to Italy, whose *Tragedy of Dido*, completed by Nash, is overlaid with mannerism, satirizes the Italianated Englishman in Piers Gaveston, the royal favourite: Nash, the English Aretino, satirizes him in Jack Witon.

Another who took part in the reaction against Petrarch was Giles Fletcher. Although he candidly acknowledges that his sonnets are but imitations from the Italian, yet, in his preface to *Licia* he protests against those who find no good poetry unless it is founded on that from Italy, France and Spain. Still, in spite of

his protest, we think he is fully imbued with the spirit of the Petrarchan style, as we can argue even only from the title of the poems he published in 1593 which runs as follows: *Licia or poems of love in honour of the admirable and singular virtues of his lady, to the imitation of the best Latin poets and others.*

Shakespeare also took an active part in the reaction against Petrarch and ridiculed what he once had practised himself. In fact he impersonates the Italianated Englishman in the character of Jacques in *As you like it*, and in *Richard II* he makes the Duke of York say:

« The open ear of youth doth always listen
Report of fashions in proud Italy
Whose manners still our tardy apish nation
Limps after in base imitation ».

Certainly we could here extend very much the list of those authors who were influenced by Italy, chiefly by Petrarch, and who wrote against Italy, and Petrarch, and the Petrarchists. We can

mention John Davis, Gabriel Harvey, John Marston, but we refrain from doing more, as a few of the principal names are sufficient to enable us to show that Petrarch, although despised, was still exercising some influence on the minds of English writers.

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Still, in the first quarter of the XVII century, Petrarchism was absolutely dying out in England: it lost all its fresh and elastic life, it was laboured, obscure, pedantic and very artificial: it could last no longer. Italy had then been for many years in full *barocco*, she was already decayed, she could not attract any longer the attention of the English poets. All literary renown was now held by France where Francis I had already protected and encouraged every kind of learning and where Marot had already written his charming poetry. Soon afterwards the Hôtel de Rambouillet was founded in Paris: it became very famous almost at

once and began very soon to spread its influence. The best talents of France either frequented the halls of the elegant Marchioness or tried to please those who frequented them, as, at the beginning, the renowned *précieuses* accomplished a worthy work of refinement on the French language, and only afterwards deserved Molière's quick satire. No wonder therefore if every Englishman travelling abroad no longer came to Italy, but stopped at Paris and tried to be introduced in the fashionable hôtel, which was also frequented by several of the cavaliers who, after having lost their cause in England, had founded a small colony in the French capital. So, little by little, Petrarch and Italian literature ceased to be imitated in England and French influence took its place.

We are now in the times of Milton of the « God-gifted organ voice of England ». The greatest English epic poet still owes something to Italy and also to Petrarch, as appears not only from his sonnets, but also from the frequent

mention of our poet in his prose works. He is at the very end of the Italian influence and marks the beginning of a new era. The pre-Miltonic sonnet had chiefly been devoted to the elaboration of amorous fantasies; Milton, as Landor says,

« Caught the sonnet from the dainty hand
Of love, who cried to lose it, and he gave
The notes of glory.... »

New editions and new translations of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* were and are still made and printed, but Milton gave the mortal blow to the Petrarchan sonnet and influence in England. Petrarch's work was already accomplished in that great country: he had given to that people the best lesson in art.

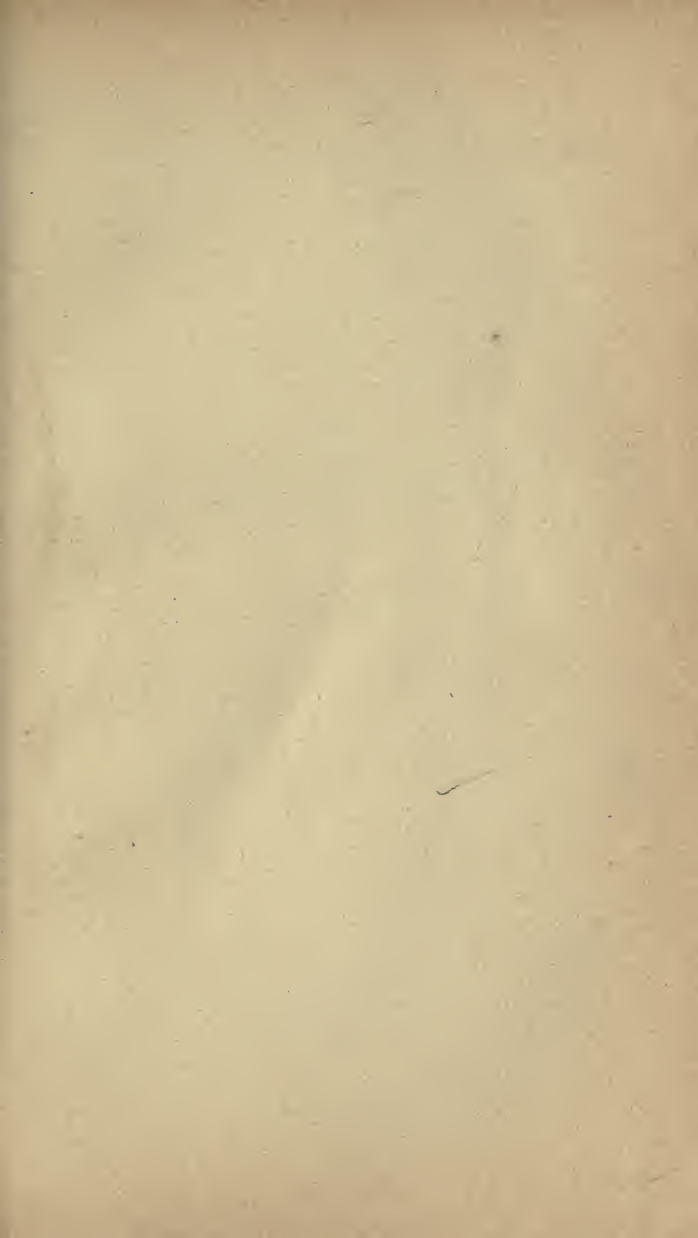


TABLE OF CONTENTS



Preface	Pag.	1
The XIV and XV centuries	»	5
The XVI century	»	23





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